

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 MANILA 005950

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR S/CT, EAP, AND EAP/MTS  
S/CT FOR RHONDA SHORE AND ED SALAZAR

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [MOPS](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: PHILIPPINES: 2005 COUNTRY REPORTS ON TERRORISM

11. (U) Post's 2005 narrative update of the Philippine portion of the 2004 Patterns of Global Terrorism report is provided below. The information is keyed to specific refTel requests.

12. (U) Summary. The Philippines, one of the earliest supporters in the global coalition against terrorism, continues to cooperate with the United States on bilateral and multilateral counterterrorism efforts. In 2005, the Philippines was repeatedly the victim of terrorist assaults, but had a number of significant arrests and convictions of terrorists; several important terrorist figures were also killed in fighting with the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). The Philippines also made some progress in tracking, blocking, and seizing terrorist assets. Nevertheless, major evidentiary and procedural obstacles in the Philippines continue to hinder the building of effective terrorism cases, and a large and growing case backlog and the absence of continuous, contiguous trials for terrorism cases are major impediments to the Philippines' prosecution of suspected terrorists. A counterterrorism bill moved forward in the House of Representatives in December, but the bill remains stalled in the Senate. End Summary.

-----  
GENERAL ASSESSMENT  
-----

13. (U) The Philippines was one of the earliest supporters in the global coalition against terrorism, and the United States continues to cooperate closely with the Philippines on bilateral and multilateral counterterrorism efforts. The Philippines unanimously won election as chairman of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation's (APEC) Counterterrorism Task Force in November 2004, and continued to hold this post throughout 2005.

14. (U) The Philippines faces threats from internal terrorism on several fronts. The United States has listed three groups operating in the Philippines as Foreign Terrorist Organizations: the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), the Communist Party of the Philippines/New People's Army (CPP/NPA), and Jemaah Islamiyah (JI). The United States has also listed two indigenous groups on its Terrorist Exclusion List: the Alex Boncayo Brigade (ABB) and the Pentagon Gang (both of which are now virtually extinct).

15. (U) In 2005, the Philippines was repeatedly the victim of terrorist attacks. In February, it suffered the worst terrorist attack of the year when three bombs went off almost simultaneously in three different cities -- Manila, Davao, and General Santos City -- killing 8 people and injuring 153. In August, a bomb exploded aboard the Dona Rosa passenger ferry in Basilan, injuring 30 people (four of whom subsequently died of their injuries).

16. (U) Philippine authorities had a number of successes against terrorists in 2005. The GRP's most recent successes were the arrest in October of several members of the ASG-affiliated Rajah Sulaiman Movement (RSM), including RSM leader Ahmad Santos, and the arrest in December of RSM's alleged second-in-command and operations chief, Pio de Vera. The Anti-Terrorism Task Force (ATTF) arrested, captured, or killed 83 suspected terrorists in 2005. ATTF also coordinated operations that led, in March, to the seizure of 600 kilograms of ammonium nitrate and other bomb-making materials being stored in an apartment in Quezon City, Metro Manila.

17. (U) 2005 also saw several significant convictions of terrorists in Philippine courts. In June, a Philippine court convicted seven members of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) responsible for the Dos Palmas kidnapping, the Lamitan siege, the Golden Harvest massacre, and the Balobo massacre, which all took place in 2001. In October, a court convicted RSM operative Angelo Trinidad, JI operative Rohmat (a.k.a Zaki), and an ASG operative Gamal Baharan for their roles in the February 14 bombings in the Philippines.

18. (U) Several key ASG figures were also killed during armed encounters with the AFP. Wedjimeh Sayad and Ahmad Sabudin, operatives serving under ASG sub-leader Jundam Jamalul, were killed in an encounter in Sulu on September 5. Jainal Usman,

a senior ASG lieutenant, who was behind the abduction of six Malaysian resort workers in 2003, was killed in fighting in Tawi-Tawi on November 17 along with two subordinates, Faizal Mohammad and Pula Ali.

19. (U) The Philippines has made some progress in tracking, blocking, and seizing terrorist assets. The main body tasked with investigating terrorist finance cases -- the Anti-Money Laundering Council (AMLC) -- completed the first phase of its information technology upgrades in 2004. From January to October 2005, AMLC received 1760 Suspicious Transaction Reports involving 8144 suspicious transactions, and had received Covered Transaction Reports involving 44 million covered transactions. As a result of the significant improvements in the GRP's anti-money laundering authorities and efforts, and AMLC's accomplishments and efforts in addressing remaining vulnerabilities, the OECD's Financial Action Task Force removed the Philippines from the Non-Cooperative Countries and Territories list in February 2005. Subsequently, AMLC was accepted as a member of the Egmont Group, a prominent body of financial intelligence units that foster international cooperation.

10. (U) U.S. and Philippine authorities worked closely during 2005 on rewards programs targeting terrorist groups. Using its Rewards Program, the U.S. Department of Defense made a major payment of \$50,000 in November to a Filipino informant for his role in the capture of Rohmat, a.k.a. Zaki, a JI operative linked to the February 14 bombings. Other payments were made to informants whose information led to the capture of ASG operatives Rasman Mohammad (\$2500, July 2005); Asbar Ismael (\$5000, September 2005); Yadzi Manatad (\$5000, September 2005); and Gumbahali Jumdaile (\$15,000, September 2005; payment made to the family of the deceased informant). The U.S. Department of Defense also made two in-kind payouts under the rewards program in July, valued at \$1000 and \$2500, respectively. The U.S. Department of State did not make any payouts in the Philippines in 2005 through its Rewards for Justice program; a payout to the informant who led to the capture of Toting Craft Hanno, an ASG terrorist under U.S. indictment for his role in the Burnham kidnappings was approved in November 2005. A reward payment will most likely be made in January 2006.

11. (U) The GRP continues to imprison Juanito Itaas, convicted by Philippine courts in connection with the 1989 murder of Embassy Manila Joint U.S. Military Advisory Group Deputy Commander Colonel James "Nick" Rowe. Donato Continente, also convicted as an accessory to the murder, was released in June 2005, after serving his full term. Both Itaas and Continente were associated with the CPP/NPA at the time of the murder.

12. (U) Major evidentiary and procedural obstacles in the Philippines continue to hinder the building of effective terrorism cases, such as the absence of a law defining and codifying terrorist acts, and restrictions on gathering of evidence. Generic problems in the law enforcement and criminal justice systems also hamper bringing terrorists to justice in the Philippines. These problems include: rampant corruption, low morale, inadequate salaries, recruitment and retention difficulties, lack of information technology upgrades, and lack of cooperation between police and prosecutors.

13. (U) A large and growing case backlog and the absence of continuous, contiguous trials for terrorism cases are the major impediments in the Philippines' prosecution of suspected terrorists.

14. (U) In 2005, after four successive years of trying, the Philippines came closer to enacting new antiterrorism legislation. A counterterrorism bill passed its second reading in the House of Representatives in December. The House bill is expected to receive its third and final reading early in 2006. The bill remains stalled in the Senate, which is seeking assurances that the provisions of the legislation would not allow the government to use it against political opponents, as well as terrorists.

15. (U) The Philippines did not extradite or request the extradition of terrorists for prosecution during 2005.

16. (U) The Philippines has issued arrest warrants for all Filipino nationals sought by the U.S. for terrorism charges. (Typically, the number of charges entered against each suspect by Philippine authorities far exceeds the number of U.S. indictments per individual.) The U.S. and the GRP signed a bilateral Extradition Treaty in 1996. The treaty gives precedence to the GRP for the prosecution, conviction, and imprisonment of Filipino criminals apprehended in the Philippines.

17. (U) The GRP does not supply any support for terrorists either within or without its borders.

118. (U) The Philippines has ratified all 12 international conventions and protocols relating to terrorism. In 2005, the GRP supported the USG in UNGA and UNSC matters related to terrorism.

-----  
SANCTUARY (SAFE HAVEN) ASSESSMENT  
-----

119. (U) The GRP is aware that some JI members have obtained safe haven in Mindanao in areas under the control of elements of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), and is actively engaged in efforts to stop this activity. The GRP is addressing the JI presence through military operations and through ongoing peace talks with the MILF. Two specific mechanisms have been established to further GRP-MILF cooperation. The Coordinating Committee for the Cessation of Hostilities (CCCH) allows GRP and MILF representatives to broker cease-fire violations. The Ad Hoc Joint Action Group provides a framework for GRP and MILF representatives to cooperate against terrorists and criminals present in MILF areas, and has begun operating with some success over the last year.

120. (U) Philippine military and law enforcement at the regional and provincial level work closely with U.S. Embassy counterparts and visiting military personnel to ensure anti-terrorism force protection to more than 25 annual USG-GRP bilateral military events conducted throughout the Philippines. In 2005, U.S. and Philippine military and law enforcement officials cooperated against JI and ASG targets, with U.S. officials actively assisting in investigating and pre-empting several terrorist attacks. Members of Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (JSOTF-P) in the southern Philippines are involved in civil-military operations and operations/intelligence fusion in order to help the AFP develop a sustained counterterrorism capability. The Embassy's law enforcement team maintains regular and intimate contact with police and security counterparts. Mission has experienced good levels of cooperation from Philippine law enforcement in the areas of access to terrorist detainees and witnesses for FBI interviews, and access to criminal, immigration, financial, and biographic records via the mechanisms established in the U.S.-Philippines Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty. DS is in the process of establishing an in-country Anti-Terrorism Assistance program that will seek to improve the capability of GRP agencies to respond to terrorist threats.

121. (U) U.S. and Philippine authorities worked closely during 2005 to continue rewards programs targeting terrorist groups. Using its Rewards Program, the U.S. Department of Defense made a number of payments ranging from \$2,500 to \$50,000 to informants who played critical roles in the capture of JI and ASG terrorists.

122. (U) Under USAID's multi-year "LEAP" program, which ended in 2005, 28,000 Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) combatants were successfully integrated into the economic mainstream. USAID stands ready to provide immediate assistance to MILF combatants and their communities if an anticipated peace deal is reached in 2006.

123. (U) In June and July, an INL-led assessment team (a Post initiative) identified critical problems in Philippine law enforcement and proposed potential solutions. Many of these proposals, if funded, will directly improve anti-terrorism efforts. One such initiative, which Post hopes to achieve in 2006, aims at improving cooperation between police and prosecutors in building legal cases, including those against terrorists.

124. (U) Neither the proliferation nor the trafficking of weapons of mass destruction play a role in terrorism in the Philippines, though the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency (NICA) remains concerned about possible future developments.

-----  
TERRORIST GROUPS  
-----

125. (U) Foreign governments do not provide financial support, military or paramilitary training, weapons, diplomatic recognition, or sanctuary from prosecution to terrorist groups operating in the Philippines.

126. (U) The major -- and worrying -- trend in the Philippines has been the growing cooperation among the country's Islamist terrorist organizations: the JI, ASG, and RSM. The near simultaneous "Valentine's Day" bombings in Manila, Davao, and General Santos involved operatives from all three entities. These bombings also utilized more technically sophisticated explosive devices, another cause for concern. The RSM, composed of Christian converts to Islam, has the ability to "blend in" and move freely about

Luzon and other areas of the Philippines, increasing the likelihood of more Islamist terror in areas outside Mindanao.

-----  
FOREIGN GOVERNMENT COOPERATION  
-----

127. (U) The Philippines was one of the earliest supporters in the global coalition against terrorism, and the United States continues to cooperate with the Philippines on bilateral and multilateral counterterrorism efforts. Philippine authorities arrested a number of terrorists in 2005 (para 6). 2005 also saw several significant convictions of terrorists in Philippine courts (para 7).

128. (U) The Philippines has issued arrest warrants for all Filipino nationals sought by the U.S. for terrorism charges. (Typically, the number of charges entered against each suspect by Philippine authorities far exceeds the number of U.S. indictments per individual.) In 2005, the GRP supported the United States in UNGA and UNSC matters related to terrorism.

129. (U) Philippine-Australian cooperation on counterterrorism issues is growing. The Australia-funded Bomb Data Center for the Philippine National Police provides a new and important resource for investigating terrorist attacks, and Australia is working with the Department of National Defense to establish a "coast watch" system to monitor better the Philippines' porous frontiers in Mindanao. The GRP also cooperated on regional counterterrorism efforts through its membership in APEC and in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The Philippines unanimously won election as chairman of APEC's Counterterrorism Task Force in November 2004, and continued to hold this post throughout 2005. At the Fifth ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime in November 2005, ASEAN nations, including the Philippines, called for the establishment of an ASEAN Convention on Counter-Terrorism.

130. (U) Border management in the Philippines is struggling under the pressures of poor physical and information technology infrastructure and insufficient capital and human resources. Increased traffic and antiquated facilities overburden air and seaports. Understaffed customs and immigration offices, manned by under-trained and underpaid officials are extremely vulnerable to corruption. The USG has made some headway in assisting the Philippines in its improvement of its border management systems.

131. (U) Despite plans dating back to 2001, the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) has yet to introduce a digitized, machine-readable passport. However, the Philippine government has completed a process of review and claims that it will roll out a machine-readable passport in 2006. While the Philippines has cooperated with USG requests for prosecutions for persons who have tampered or altered travel documents, the prosecutions carry low-level penalties for criminals who commit this type of fraud. In addition, there is a reluctance to investigate or charge vendors or users of false documents when the Philippine government was not the issuing authority. Under current Philippine law, the suspect must present the fraudulent document as genuine before a Philippine Government authority in order for a crime to have been committed.

132. (U) Embassy Manila's POC for the 2005 Terrorism Report is Political Officer John Groch (grochjr@state.gov).

Jones